



**STATE OF ARKANSAS
ASA HUTCHINSON, GOVERNOR**

Arkansas Women's Commission
Chair: Alison Williams, Chief of Staff to the Governor
Meeting # 6
Arkansas Tech University, 204 West O Street, Russellville
August 17, 2022

Attendees In Person: Gayatri Agnew, Dr. Charisse Childers, Senator Breanne Davis, Kim Lane, Tamika Edwards, Beverly Morrow, Apprilla Porch, Maddie Spickard, Alison Williams

Virtual Attendees: Dr. Jones-Branch, Dr. Verónikha Salazar, Kathy Webb, Dr. Kathy White Loyd

Absent: Mellie Bridewell, Senator Joyce Elliott, Heather Larkin, Auditor Andrea Lea, Dr. Todd Shields, Naija White

MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER AND WELCOME

- The Chair called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.
- The Chair thanked our host Commissioner, Senator Breanne Davis and Arkansas Tech University for welcoming us. The Chair invited Senator Davis to say a few words.
 - Senator Davis seconded the Chairs comments on Arkansas Tech and them welcoming the Commission to the campus. Senator Davis thanked everyone for coming.
- The Chair also recognized Stephanie Duffield, who is the Chair of the Board of Trustees for Arkansas Tech University.
- The Chair asked Dr. Mary Gunter on behalf of the President's Office to give her welcome.
 - Dr. Gunter stated that the President was unable to be with the Commission. Dr. Gunter extended a welcome and appreciation to the Commission for allowing Arkansas Tech to host our meeting.
 - Dr. Gunter stated that the Commission joined Tech as they welcomed their students to the 113 session of Arkansas Tech.
 - The Chair asked for a motion to adopt the minutes from the last meeting on July 15, 2022
 - Beverly Morrow made the motion and Gayatri Agnew seconded.
 - Without objection minutes from May 13, 2022, meeting were adopted.
- The Chair asked if there was any old business to take back up for discussion.

- The Chair invited representatives from each of the subcommittees to update the Commission on their work since the last meeting.

2. REPORTS

- Research and Writing Committee – Dr. Cherisse Jones-Branch
 - Dr. Jones-Branch said that she, the Chair, and her co-chair Dr. Todd Shields met a few days ago to talk the survey as it stands right now.
 - Dr. Jones-Branch said that they were eager to receive the committees' research reports.
 - They have already received some information from the Covid-19 committee and Dr. White Lloyd's committee.
- Labor force Participation and Barriers to Entry and Retention Committee – Dr. Charisse Childers
 - Dr. Childers stated that their committee has been very busy as they have worked to pull together their report and submit the report to The Chair.
 - Dr. Childers reported that their report has several sub-sections. Those sections are on:
 - STEM
 - Hunger
 - Single Mothers
 - Entrepreneurs
 - Mentoring
 - The Committee still has several reports that they need to review as part of their analysis on policy recommendations.
 - The report was submitted so that they could ensure that the committee had their information, and they could elaborate and do further work if need be.
 - Still have a little bit of work to do but they expect to work within the committee for the next couple of weeks to make those recommendations.
- Impacts of Covid-19 Committee – Beverly Morrow
 - Ms. Morrow stated that at the beginning of their research they realized that broad to cover everything. They decided to look at the:
 - The impact of Covid on mental and behavioral health.
 - Decrease of women's healthcare services, especially in Rural Arkansas.
 - Lack of domestic violence support services during the pandemic.
 - Lack of childcare services during the pandemic.
 - Personal and family isolation due to the pandemic.
 - All the research has been downloaded, and they are in the process of getting the put in the proper format. Looking to have this process complete by the end of September.
- Family Caregiving Committee – Gayatri Agnew
 - Ms. Agnew stated that they had had a flurry of activity. They have had different guests come in and speak with them about different aspects of family care giving.
 - Ms. Agnew said that they were trying to balance the definition of family caregiving.
 - Ms. Agnew stated that they have chosen as a committee to put 90% of their research into childcare as a subset of family caregiving.
 - The committee has not had a chance to dig into eldercare and families that have family members that have disabilities. They will have short sections that highlight these areas.
 - The lion's share of the report, partly because of the wording of the Executive Order, is asking about the state of childcare economy here in Arkansas.

- They will focus on the aspect of family care that is specific to childcare. This has been broken down into five key areas that are all reviewed through the lens of:
 - Quality of care.
 - Affordability of care.
 - Geography of care.
- They will be highlighting pain points into access to care, including infant care and school-age childcare
- Arkansas has outstanding pre- k.
- If your child is aged 3-4 you have a greater probability of finding quality care for your child. If your child is an infant the same cannot be said.
- They will be highlighting infant care and After School Care.
- There is a need to understand non-traditional hours care.
 - Childcare for workers who work outside of the 9-5 type jobs.
 - What is the current state of that?
 - How do we measure that?
 - How is it tracked?
 - Are we meeting the needs of those workers?
- Providers of Care
 - Types of Providers
 - State of the State on who is providing the care.
 - How the overall availability of care can be expanded. Highlighting some of the programs that are helping to do that currently.
 - Recommendations on how we can do more of that.
 - Workers who are providing that care.
- Committee has a lot of writing to do to get the report to the Research and Writing Committee, and they are aware of the deadline.
- Committee call out for experts in the elder care sector or disability care space would like those recommendations.
- The Chair stated that our goal is for actionable recommendations. These recommendations should consider actions that can be taken by other organizations in the community, not just the Legislative and Executive branches.
- Dr. Jones-Branch will be hosting us for our meeting in Jonesboro. That meeting will be September 14, 2022. Final details are forthcoming.

3a. NEW BUSINESS

- The Chair introduced our guest speaker Governor Michelle “Miki” Bowman of the Federal Reserve System Board and provided a brief biography.
- Governor Bowman thanked everyone for participating in the incredibly important work that the commission is doing.
 - Spoke about women’s workforce participation.
 - From a rural community deep in the flint hills of Kansas.
 - Great to see the progress that Arkansas has made.
 - There were well-intended programs created to provide assistance for those affected by the recession and the opioid pandemic but made it hard for small employers to find employees.

- The problem was that it was more beneficial to receive the benefit from these programs than it was to work.
 - ❖ The payments from these programs were far in excess of what these individuals could earn working.
- Policymakers need to think about and carefully weigh all of the consequences and unintended consequences of their decisions.
- Will be focusing on women in the U.S. Economy since the onset of Covid-19
 - Women suffered disproportionality more job losses than men during the pandemic.
 - Opposite of past recessions when mostly men lost their jobs.
 - When schools closed and childcare was disrupted women assumed the majority of the responsibility for care. This caused women to quit their jobs and drop out of the labor force.
 - This magnified the effect by eliminating jobs in childcare, resulting in even more unemployment.
- Today more women than men hold a bachelor's degree.
- The response to the Covid-19 Pandemic caused the most abrupt decline in employment in the history of this country.
 - The lock downs and other government restrictions on businesses severely limited work, education, and travel.
 - The pandemic toll was exceptionally hard on in-person close-contact service industries. Restaurants, hotels, airline travel and retail businesses with the exception of the big box stores, pharmacies, and grocery stores.
 - These service industry jobs were considered more conducive to spreading Covid-19.
 - They were more affected by government mandated shutdowns and social distancing. Teleworking was not possible.
 - This downturn in unemployment fell more heavily on women than men.
- There are two reasons why the pandemic downturn affected more women than men.
 - After the dramatic employment gains of the past 50 years, women are still most often the primary caregivers to children and other family members.
 - A higher proportion of women worked in and continue to work in professions that have high contact service sectors.
- Caregiving burdens in the United States have always fallen on women.
 - Women with children tend to cycle in and out of employment based on their families' childcare demands.
 - Women are significantly affected by summer childcare burdens.
- Today working women still carry out the majority of the childcare responsibilities.
 - Even when women work, they still spend 50% more time on childcare than men.
- The labor market continues to be strong now and there are many opportunities for workers of all education and skill levels. We still have about 4 million people out of the workforce since before the pandemic. There are still plenty of job openings even if we see the number of job openings reduce.
- We are also seeing a larger number of women graduating from college than men.
 - This should help ensure women against job losses in future recessions.

- The future of the labor supply is uncertain, which makes it difficult to predict how labor force participation will evolve.
- The lingering affects of Covid can cause Labor Force Participation issues. Those lingering affects interfere with the ability to:
 - Work
 - Impose additional caregiving needs for families.
 - 1/5th of adults who contracted Covid reported ongoing symptoms of Covid affecting more women than men.
- The number of working age people with disabilities has increased significantly.
 - The increase picked up in mid-2020 and added about 2 million more people reporting that they have a disability in July 2022. 2 million more than at the on-set of the pandemic.
 - This has been a major drag on the workforce in rural areas.
- Women's Labor Force Attachment in Arkansas is below the National Average.
 - Before the pandemic about 72% of prime age women were either working or looking for work compared to 75% nationally.
- Lessons to draw:
 - Research suggests that assistance programs including job search assistance, training programs, and private sector employment subsidies increase the likelihood of employment by up to 10% for those that use the programs. Women are more likely to benefit from these programs.
- Governor Bowman thanked the commission or the opportunity to share her thoughts on labor force participation.
 - Governor Bowman entertained commission questions.

3b. FOCUS GROUP

- 2020 was a black smudge on business owners' records. Banks were turning people away telling them to come back. Restrictions caused a lot of businesses to close, and they were not making money.
- How do we engage younger women in STEM and Robotics?
 - Working with businesses to show young women manufacturing jobs.
 - Bridging the gap in local areas to get women in manufacturing industry.
 - High end tech and technological technology.
 - Educators to work with local businesses for exposure.
- Access to capital.
- Tracking mental health for children who are not in the public-school environment.
 - Financial education, e.g., Economics Arkansas, Business Plans and Literacy
- Not enough female investors.
- More equity in the kinds of businesses that people are investing in.
- The Chair turned the meeting over to Senator Davis for concluding comments.
 - Auditor Lea got pulled away unexpectedly and sends her regrets.
- The Chair personally our special guest and Arkansas Tech for hosting the commission.
- The Chair adjourned the meeting at 2:31 pm.